

## Christian Work on the University Campus<sup>1</sup>

Just why I, of all people, was chosen to introduce the topic of Christian work on the campus, I do not know. I confess, though, to being grateful for the opportunity of sharing my thoughts with you for the few minutes allotted.

The first question one must deal with, or one of the first, is that of the prevailing view of scholarship and its relation to student response to religion. I have only enough time to present some propositions, seed thoughts and have to leave their elaboration for some other occasion or, perhaps, for the discussion afterwards.

- (1) Religion is at best optional and rather unscientific. Religion is basically a private affair that has little or no bearing on natural science and hardly more on social sciences. At any rate, religion is irrelevant to genuine scholarship. Furthermore, scholarship is objective, while religion is intensely subjective. Scholarship deals with objective facts which speak for themselves and is based on rational research. Religion is subjective, does not require research and is hardly rational.
- (2) The response of students to this situation is highly individual, of course, but some generalizations can be made. I make them partially on basis of a little bit of research I did a few years ago among Christian university students, especially at ABU.
  - (a) Many Christians among students of arts and social sciences fall by the wayside. The assumptions on which their courses rest are too powerful in their implication and they are not equipped spiritually or mentally to withstand this subtle attack.
  - (b) Students in the natural sciences have less difficulty, for they shield themselves by giving in to the division of scholarship and religion. They

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<sup>1</sup> "Christian Work on the University Campus." Lecture delivered at the University of Jos and other campuses in Nigeria's Middle Belt, 1977 (4 pp.). *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, p. 180.

frequently see hardly any relation between their study and their religion. Thus you will find that among Christian groups on the campus there are many more students of natural science than those of arts and social sciences.<sup>2</sup>

- (c) Some students find support in Christian groups (FCS etc.) on the campus. However, upon graduation they lose this support and then the lack of integration of their Christian faith and their studies takes its revenge – they fall by the wayside, for the artificial props are gone.
- (d) And non-Christian students? They find all the ammunition they need to shield themselves from a serious examination of the Gospel. Their classroom experiences and studies all help to fix them in their non-Christian stance – I say, “non-Christian” not “non-religious” for reasons you will soon understand.

Now, given this situation, what shape ought Christian work to take? I am grateful for the evangelism done by any group, FCS, Great Commission, individuals. I rejoice with the angels in heaven at any person who comes to Christ. In addition to such conversions, however, we need more if we are to make faith in Christ a real option at the university level. The first change is probably to take place within us, teachers and evangelists. I dare say that quite a number of us entertain a dualistic version of Christianity, a narrow version in which we see service to God, real service, to consist in so-called spiritual things, while our academic work bears no direct relationship to our Christian faith. It is time we realize the nature of religion in general.

In short, every man is religious, whether he realizes it or not. We know we are religious, but the secular man does not know it. He has given in to the myth of objectivity and neutrality without examining it. However, there is all kinds of evidence that science is not neutral at all. The different scientific schools of thought, the choice between what to do research on, these are already evidence that science is hardly objective and neutral. Furthermore, the Bible itself speaks comprehensively about religion. All issues arise in man’s heart and it is this heart

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<sup>2</sup> At this point I took a straw poll to have science students and others raise their hands.

that determines one's faith. If he does not give it to Christ, then he can give it to the god of science, but in both cases he is a believer. It is not a matter of faith over against science, but of what faith, between true and false faith. If we are to give Christianity a place on the campus, we have to unmask the religion of neutrality for what it is, a religion, based on beliefs and assumptions. It is then that Christianity can be demonstrated as a viable option, an alternative faith that makes as much sense as faith in objective scholarship—if not more! Then the two stand side by side on an equal level.

Not only is every person religious, *every* person, but religion serves to integrate us. And it is true that in the case of the modern secular scholar his faith and scholarship are integrated; they support each other. He does not usually experience a tension between the two. However, many Christians do experience a tension between their faith and their academic pursuits. Often we seek to solve it by separating the two by saying that our scholarship is one thing, while our faith in Christ is another. But this leaves the largest slice of our existence outside the bond of Christ, without any relation to the Gospel. We have given in to the modern idea of objective scholarship.

It is time we ourselves, *we*, we do away with this myth and begin to examine the relationship between our academic specialties and the Gospel. Whether you are a Christian or a secularist should make a real difference in your economics, your political science, your history etc. Those of us who have not integrated our faith and scholarship must begin to study seriously the writings of Christian scholars in our respective fields, we must pray fervently that God will deliver us from our dualism and read the Bible anew with the spectacles not of dualism but of wholism. We must do this together with other Christians in our fields and together agonize before the Lord.

Once we have been able to attain some integration then we will know how to reform our teaching in the classroom by unmasking the assumptions of modern secular scholarship, the myth or faith underlying it all. This is not to cast doubt on science itself, but to once again place it in proper perspective. Then, too, no one can fault you for indicating Christian direction in your field, for you have as much

right to indicate *your* assumptions as does the secularist. As is, only the secularist has the right.

In short, my Christian colleagues, the students must be confronted with the Gospel as it really is – in all its breadth, depth, splendour, in its all-embracing nature. I believe this to be a key to approaching a modern university campus.

Personally, I am slowly building up a library of literature on various disciplines that relate these disciplines to the Gospel. You are welcome to borrow. Secondly, I am selling literature of this type. Thirdly, I am looking for funds to purchase and donate such books for the university library so that students – or faculty -- can have ready access to them. Fourthly, though I have been terribly busy this academic year, I expect that next year it will be better. Then I hope to be able to sit down with students in some discipline to explore together with them the relation of the Gospel for their discipline. This is in order to help integration and to equip them to witness better in an academic community and to equip them for a future life in which their faith and occupation will become more integrated and the community see the practical relevance of the Gospel of Christ.

I would, finally, recommend that a way be found in which we can have a fulltime chaplain at this university. If this were a person integrated in spirit and scholarship, (s)he could be a tremendous focus for Christian work on this campus.

In closing, I wish to make clear that the approach I am recommending is not meant to replace any efforts at direct evangelism now going on. However, I believe that my approach would provide a better intellectual and academic climate for such evangelism on a university campus.